

## House Republican Press Release

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### Norwalk-Danbury link probed



**By ROBERT KOCH** *Hour Staff Writer* NORWALK -- State Rep. Toni Boucher, R-143, has offered an alternative to building Super Route 7 to link Norwalk and Danbury. Boucher introduced legislation this month that would permit the state Department of Transportation to sell right-of-way land needed to build Super Route 7.

Proceeds would be used to widen the existing Route 7, improve the Danbury line of Metro-North railroad and preserve selected areas as open space. "This is the most cost-effective environmentally beneficial solution and will get us relief in the shortest amount of time. We can't wait another 20 years for a superhighway to be built," said Boucher, standing Monday afternoon at the intersection of the Route 7 connector and Grist Mill Road. At the intersection, a rock ledge and traffic lights illustrate starkly where Super 7, decades in the making, came to a screeching halt years ago amid environmental concerns and fierce opposition from smaller communities along its proposed route. Boucher, whose district comprises primarily Wilton, said Super 7, if built, would be a suspension highway running high above the ground through difficult terrain. The resulting roadway would have "huge environmental impacts," including runoff of salt, sand and dangerous chemicals onto the land, she said. By contrast, selling the right-of-way land would free money to electrify and straighten the Metro-North line, cutting 20 minutes off the ride to New York City, and allow the existing Route 7 to be widened, also benefiting commuters, Boucher said. "Why not expand the current roadway to four lanes? Right now, we know this is doable," said Boucher, assistant minority leader and transportation committee member. Portions in Wilton "have been approved. It's in the design phase." At a later date, the state could build Super 7 by exercising its eminent domain powers to reclaim right-of-way land, Boucher added. Local legislators, whose districts include more of Norwalk, are praising aspects of Boucher's legislation -- improving the Danbury railroad line and adding open space -- while rejecting the sale of the right-of-way land. "When we talk about transportation issues and economic development, having a highway from Norwalk to Danbury has become even more necessary," said House Deputy Minority Leader Lawrence F. Cafero Jr., R-142. "I'm always hopeful that the state and the state Department of Transportation and circumstance will be such that the Super 7 project will go through," he said. That said, Cafero Jr. praised Boucher as a thoughtful legislator, who offered an alternative to Super 7 instead of "just saying no." Norwalk Mayor Alex Knopp, a Democrat and former state representative, said passing Boucher's legislation would represent a "Draconian condemnation of any future opportunity to build a new Route 7." "This is the third or fourth time this wolf in sheep's clothing has been proposed. In the past, the sheep's

clothing was open space or affordable housing, and now it's transportation," Knopp said. "A short-term idea of selling this land to get funds is a long-term execution of (Super) Route 7." Knopp said the rationale for Super Route 7 is that most high-wage job growth is occurring in Norwalk and Stamford, while affordable housing is growing in the Danbury region. The new highway would connect workers to jobs. State Sen. Bob Duff, D-25, said he supports improving the Norwalk-Danbury rail line and setting land aside for open space. But he also vigorously opposes selling right-of-way land needed for Super 7. "The issue is to keep our eye on the ball for (Super) Route 7. It's critical to our economic viability that the highway gets built," Duff said. "We need people to get out of the way so it can get built, and we need the commitment of the governor so we can set aside the money." State Rep. Christopher Perone, D-137, took a more receptive stance toward Boucher's proposal -- provided it does not cut off the Super 7 option. "I support improving the flow, whether it comes to widening in key areas to move traffic through or possibly looking at a good plan for Super 7," said Perone, also on the transportation committee. "I'm open to something that addresses everybody along (the route) and benefits and pulls more traffic off our streets," he said.